UK Focus Group Evidence:
Consumer Attitudes to Local, National and Imported Foods
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Implications of a Nutrition Driven Food Policy for Land Use and the Rural Environment
Executive Summary

Four focus groups (total n=33) were conducted at The University of Reading during June 2005. The aim of these was to examine consumers’ attitudes to, and willingness to pay for, local, national and imported foods. Overall, the focus groups demonstrated that participants could clearly distinguish between local, national and imported foods both geographically and in terms of their defining attributes. Specifically, local foods were perceived to be of better quality and ‘fresher’ than national or imported foods; but were limited in terms of having less variety and choice than foods that were imported. Moreover, it was established that local foods were rarely purchased among our sample due to their perceived lack of availability, inconvenience and higher prices, despite a wish to support local producers. Overall, the participants felt that other members of society were less interested in issues relating to country of origin than they were, with the exception of older people who were judged to be more sensitive to and more willing to purchase local foods. Finally, although most participants currently bought few local products, many expressed a willingness to buy more in future if certain barriers such as perceived inconvenience were removed.
Introduction

This focus group study forms part of a larger research project that is jointly funded by the ESRC, NERC and BBSRC research councils. The overall objective of the project is to examine the potential for competitive UK food production that delivers foods that consumers wish to buy at prices they are willing to pay and to assess the impact on land use, the environment and the economy. As part of this, a major aim of the project is to assess the feasibility and implications of using improved farming and growing techniques to produce nutritionally enhanced and UK produced foodstuffs (e.g., soft fruits with enhanced phytochemical content). In so doing, the project draws on expertise from a wide range of disciplines including economics, psychology, ecology, crop science, animal science and human diet and health.

Given the potential for nutritionally enhanced (i.e., healthier) foods that are produced within the UK, it is important to estimate how increased consumer demand for these products will likely affect UK land use and the rural economy and environment. As a first step, and to provide information for economic (WP1) and land use (WP5) policy simulations, the aim of the current focus groups (WP2, Phase 1) is therefore to examine consumers’ current attitudes to, and willingness to pay for local and national foods versus imported ones. The information obtained from these qualitative focus groups will be used to develop a large sample survey to provide additional quantitative data regarding consumers’ attitudes towards local, national and imported goods.

In total, four focus Groups were conducted at The University of Reading during June 2005. This report presents the results of those discussions based on a focus group protocol (see appendix 3) produced by the Department of Psychology and by using a framework analysis. Section 1 provides a brief review of existing country of origin research, whereas section 2 outlines the recruitment procedure, administration, logistics and demographics of the focus groups. Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 address the issues raised during the discussion groups in relation to the main protocol headings. Section 7 focuses
on summarising and evaluating the main findings and compares and contrasts these issues amongst and within the Groups.

**Section 1- Background**

Previous research that has focused on consumers’ perceptions of the country of origin (COO) of products has generally classified consumer behaviour issues in terms of either two components or three dimensions. The components include COO as a cue for quality, dependability, reliability etc about the product when there is little other information available; and secondly, relating to a person’s Group identity or national pride (Bruning, 1997). The dimensions, encompassing the above components include: cognitive – representing the perceived characteristics of the nation and its products; affective – the attitude of an individual towards a country likes and dislikes (neophobia); normative – the ‘appropriate’ or proper actions conveyed with regards to a country and its people (Groves, 2000).

Nes & Bilkey (1993) noted that COO should not be discussed as the sole issue regarding product purchase as it is merely one of several attributes which may influence purchase decisions, and in order to compare and measure, the importance of locality of production of the food needs to be placed alongside other attributes which may influence purchase. A 1998 study of British consumers suggested that they have a broad although socially differentiated knowledge of the origin of foods, and that although it is often limited, the knowledge of food origin does play a significant role in food choice Cook et al (1998). They note the reasons for this are: due to production process concerns (animal welfare, fair trade etc); healthiness of certain foods and high perceived quality (country/wholesome image) and the authenticity of food (Cook et al, 1998).
Figure 2 – UK Supermarkets and Local Foods (2002)


Section 2- Recruitment and Group Composition

2.1 Recruitment

Recruitment of the (WP2, Phase 1) focus groups was subcontracted to RSSL a market research company based on The University of Reading campus.

Telephone recruitment was carried out between the 30th May and 10th June 2005 in the Reading region for four focus groups of between 8 and 10 individuals. These groups were differentiated by socio-economic status (SES) with 2 groups comprising individuals of lower SES and 2 groups comprising individuals of higher SES. SES was based on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household. Recruitment also aimed for a gender balance in each group, a selection of people from different age Groups (18-30, 31-49,
50-70), a 50:50 split of people with children under the age of 16, and a balance of people from urban and rural areas. Each individual recruited was asked, at the recruitment stage, for their age, level of education and occupation. Information regarding urban/rural living was obtained by asking participants “How would you describe where you live?” and categorising city, town or suburb responses as urban and village or open country responses as rural (see Appendix 1 for the recruitment questionnaire used).

The various recruitment criteria outlined above were employed because it seemed likely that attitudes towards local, national and imported foods could vary between different sub-groups (e.g., rural versus urban dwellers).

2.2 Administrative and logistical details
The 4 focus groups were conducted over afternoons/evenings (Monday 13th June, Monday 20th June and Tuesday 21st June 2005). The three afternoon groups began at 3pm and the evening group at 6pm, with each group scheduled to last one and half hours. The groups were held in a meeting room in the Agriculture Building on the campus of The University of Reading. Participants were provided with a £25 cash incentive for their time and travel expenses.

The chairs and a table were set up in the room in a circle to encourage open discussion. The discussions were recorded onto an audiocassette tape and by MP3 directly onto a laptop. Each discussion lasted one and a half hours which included an introduction and an opportunity for participants to ask any questions. Information relating to the project and the required ethical documents were provided.

The moderator had a background in consumer behaviour and food economics research as well as experience in assisting group discussions.

2.3 Demographics
Of the 38 individuals recruited, 33 participated, all were from Reading or surrounding areas (Berkshire, Oxfordshire) which is located about one hour west of London and is generally characterised as an area with a culturally
diverse population and a wide variety of different socio-economic groups. There was one group with 5 participants, two groups with 9 participants, and a final group with 10 participants (see Table 1 below for detailed socio-demographic data).

Table 1  
Socio-Demographic Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>SocioEcon</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Chief earner</th>
<th>Children under 16</th>
<th>Urban/Rural</th>
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<td>Research Engineer</td>
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2.3.1 Socio-economics
The participants were recruited in groups of low and high SES dependent on the occupation of the chief income earner in the household. Due to the small size of group 1, there were slightly fewer participants of a lower SES (14 out of 33).

2.3.2 Age and gender
Across the groups there were 22 women and 11 men. Group 3 was the most imbalanced in terms of gender, having only one male participant and eight female; groups 1 and 4 were the most balanced in terms of gender. Across all groups the youngest participant was 18 years old (male) and the eldest 67 years old (female). Age groups 31-49 and 50-70 were over represented, although all groups apart from group 1 contained at least one participant aged 18-30.

2.3.3 Children
Fourteen of the 33 participants had children under the age of 16, of whom 10 were female. All ten women with children under the age of 16 were under the age of 41. All of the 4 male participants with children under the age of 16 were over 37.

2.3.4 Urban/Rural location
Achieving an urban/rural balance was the most difficult aspect of recruitment and only 7 of the participants were from rural areas. However, all groups apart from group 1 contained at least two participants from rural areas.

2.3.5 Occupation
Eight of the 33 participants were retired, another eight were housewives (one house husband), and three were unemployed.

2.3.6 Education
There was no recruitment criteria regarding education and groups were overall balanced with roughly half the participants having no more than an
upper secondary school qualification and half having some form of tertiary education.

Section 3 – Attributes & attitudes
In order to achieve consensus within each group, the ideas presented in these sections were summarised in writing on A5 sheets of paper which were placed on the wall of the room. This was used to facilitate the initial discussion and to provide a reference point specifically relating to the definitions of local, national and imported foods (see Appendix 2 for a type-written version of these sheets). A focus group protocol was used as a rough guide for discussions for each of the focus groups (see Appendix 3 for a copy of the protocol).

3.1 Local, National & Imported foods: Meanings, Differences, Advantages and Disadvantages
Initially, each group was asked to give their interpretation of the meaning of local, national and imported foods, the idea being to illicit more than just a basic geographical classification although this was the starting point for groups 1 and 3. Group 2 began by spontaneously discussing the concept of freshness, and group 4 began by discussing examples of produce that were defined by one of these categories. Importantly, across all groups there was a general consensus regarding the geographical definition of local, national and imported foods and all participants were able to clearly distinguish these three food types. The discussions also indicated that the distinction between local and national foods was perceived as being just as important as that between UK produced and imported foods.

Moving on from the geographical classification, participants identified a broad range of issues during the course of their discussions that were relevant to the distinction between local, national and imported foods. For example, seasonality was identified as an important factor in distinguishing between local/national and imported foods. Additionally, participants also considered the aesthetics, authenticity, freshness, taste, choice and variety of produce in relation to local, national and imported foods. Interestingly, the link between
locally grown food and organic food was raised in all four groups. Economic issues such as price, labelling and traceability (accessibility) as well as availability and convenience were also common themes. Transport costs and packaging were also raised, as were the different production and sale methods, including concepts of “mass production”, “bulk” and “commercial”. Where the food was bought from (local store, supermarkets) versus where the food was grown or produced was also addressed to varying degrees across groups. Food safety regulations and standards were also discussed, as too were other political issues including labelling, subsidies and trade. Finally, participants’ culture, religion and ethics including the concepts of trade embargos, fair trade, support for the local community and animal welfare were addressed to varying degrees.

3.1.1 Local
Group 1 defined local to be within a 30 mile radius, whereas groups 2 and 3 began with a 50 mile radius although there was discussion that this was too large and perhaps a 20 mile radius was more appropriate. Finally, group 4 agreed that a 50 mile radius was an optimal geographic distinction. Hence, local was defined within a relatively constrained geographical range of between 20-50 miles. This fits squarely within the 30 mile definition for local foods recommended by the Campaign to Protect Rural England in 2002.

It was debated in all groups whether a product was local if it was produced locally or bought locally “...that’s a point, is it local because you buy it locally, or local because its grown locally?” (3M, 1F), with general consensus on those goods produced locally being local. Groups 2 and 4 discussed this issue in much more detail than other Groups and at least one male (Group 4) did not distinguish between buying at a local shop and buying local produce.

A number of food products were perceived to be ‘local’, including strawberries, fruit and vegetables, milk and cheeses. Group 3 raised specific foods e.g. Bakewell Tarts, Cornish pasties “I just said things were actually produced locally that were typical of the area where you were” (3F),
although there was some discussion as to whether such foods also constituted national products.

Local food products were usually purchased in small stores, direct from the farmer (i.e., farmer’s markets) or self produced “I also think that it’s things that I would buy at a farmers market” (3F), “...pick your own” (4F, 3F) or “...grown at home” (3F). Crucially, local foods were seen to be relatively inconvenient “Its very difficult to shop anywhere else but a supermarket now” (4F), “I couldn’t tell you the last time I went to a farmers’ market because its easier to drive into Tesco’s or Waitrose” (1F), and inaccessible in the sense that they are not easy to find “I make the assumption that if I go to the supermarket I’m not going to get local food” (3F). However, some participants said they would buy more local foods if it was more convenient to do so (Group 1).

Interestingly, some people were aware that limited local produce was now sold in particular supermarkets “Well in M&S I’ve noticed lately they’ve started putting the name of the farmer...even if it comes from Devon, this is the sort of , you know, nearby product” (3F), although others didn’t feel it was clearly labelled or traceable “There’s not enough labelling” (4F); “I still don’t know when I go to the supermarket whether I actually know that it is local or not” (4M). Products that were less packaged and contained less additives were seen as good indicators of local produce.

Seasonality was discussed in all groups and had both a positive and a negative with respect to having tastier products versus a limited choice of products. Local foods were perceived to be tastier “I prefer home grown because it tastes nicer” (1F) “I think they are a lot tastier” (4F), “...technically they should be [tastier]” (4M), and fresher “Local should mean freshness” (2F) than their alternatives (Groups 2, 3 and 4). Women were the ones that introduced and focussed on taste and freshness issues. Surprisingly, although nutrition was mentioned in Group 3 “…slightly more nutritious because they haven’t travelled so far” (3F) it was not an issue that was elaborated on nor raised in any other Groups.
Interestingly, the concept of organic production was linked with local production in all groups, with women raising the issue of organic food in the discussion on classifying local produce. Groups 1 and 2 referred to organic in terms of price “That’s organic...doubled the price” (1F) “I would by organic if I could afford it” (2F) and preference although they did not say that organic and local were one and the same. In groups 3 and 4 the terms were initially synonymous for at least one female participant, however upon discussion with other members of the group they decided that perhaps the concepts were different: “I’d like to think that they really are organic...they [local foods] can be seen as similar to organic but I don’t really think they are” (4F). Finally, Group 4 alone discussed the aesthetics of local and organic produce “...they’re [local and organic products] not perfectly formed are they?” (4F).

Generally local foods were perceived to be more expensive than their national or imported counterparts “I mean I assume now that its more expensive, but I couldn’t [know]” (1F), “...more expensive generally” (3F), “...its just so much more expensive, a lot more expensive” (4F). “...I think sort of generally it just seems more expensive doesn’t it, locally grown stuff, for some reason” (1M). Furthermore, a number of participants commented on the difficulty of equating actual cost with what they thought local produce should cost “...you’d expect it to be [cheaper] because if there’s less transport, less packaging involved but its not always the case, is it?” (3F), “Yes, you can’t really equate to what it should cost locally to what it costs” (1M). Thus, local food was perceived to be over priced. Local food was also seen as less ‘commercial’ than national or imported foods (and national versus imported too) in Groups 2 and 4. However, this was not necessarily seen as a positive feature (Group 2).

Groups 1 and 2 were very local community minded as they highlighted, without prompting, the fact that buying local produce helps to support local farmers “Supporting local farmers...I think it is [an important thing
“to do]” (1F), “Choose to support the farmer up the road, maybe it’d be better than supporting the guy in Africa...Because I know him up the road. Yes, he’s my friend” (F2). This apparent support for local produce can be contrasted with actual self-reported purchasing behaviour (see section 3.1).

Finally, when on holiday the focus on eating local foods seemed to change probably due to participants having more time to seek out local produce “I was on holiday last week, in Jamaica, and part of the thing of being away is buying the local produce” (1F). This appeared to be the case whether holidaying outside of the UK (e.g. Jamaica or rural France), or within the UK itself (e.g., Cornwall). The food abroad was also seen to be tastier and of higher quality “I’ve just come back from France, the food over there that’s grown in the sunshine undoubtedly, undoubtedly their tomatoes taste better than our tomatoes” (4F), “…you’ve got to have bananas when you’re there because they’re so much better, because they’re local bought and they’re really nice, it was, it was lovely” (1F).

3.1.2 National
National products were defined as foods produced within the UK – here Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were included, whereas Ireland (not distinctly geographically different to Northern Ireland) was considered overseas. This impression was conveyed across all four groups.

Beyond the geographical classification, Group 3 raised the issue of whether foods that were typical or characteristic of England could be defined as national or even local regardless of where they were produced e.g. Bakewell tarts, specific cheeses, Yorkshire puddings and Cornish pasties, “I would assume that it’s (Yorkshire puddings) made, well, produced in this country” (1M). Some of these products were seen to be an indicator of quality produce (groups 1 & 3). There was a distinction between produced in Britain and packed in Britain (groups 1 & 4). Only food produced in Britain should be ‘national’ according to Group 1, whereas Group 4 were not in
complete agreement. Note that there was an assumption that certain foods (‘national foods’ e.g. cheeses, North Sea cod, Yorkshire puddings) come from where they are thought to be produced – but this is not necessarily so “…although, you’d think, for instance a piece of cod would come from the North Sea” (1M). Meat, dairy and vegetables were considered to be products that should be ‘British’.

National foods were identified as being typically found in supermarkets (group 3), and the issue of traceability was mentioned (groups 2 & 3) with specific reference to Waitrose and Marks and Spencers. “Certainly with milk, they (Waitrose) make a big thing about knowing all the farmers and dairies” (3F); “at Waitrose it tells you the farm, which always makes me feel quite sort of, I can picture the cow” (2F).

Price and convenience were the main reasons for purchasing nationally produced foods. Group 1 mentioned that national food is subsidised by the supermarkets and therefore cheaper (although this was later disagreed with) and participants also noted that national food is mass produced “I would say national foods are produced in mass amounts” (1F), which also decreases its price. Purchasing national food was also viewed as being good for the UK economy.

The issue of seasonality was raised by all groups as both a benefit and limitation, although growing food outside of season in greenhouses nationally was acknowledged too “…they grow things in greenhouses don’t they?” (1F)

3.1.3 Imported
Anything produced overseas was classified as imported. All groups raised the issue of products that cannot be grown in the UK, with emphasis on tropical fruits and vegetables. Imported foods were generally purchased at the supermarket, were generally frozen and packaged, and less fresh due to being transported and stored “…I think that [imported foods] as like tinned foods, packaged, frozen foods” (3F).
The availability of imported foods and the increased choice that this brings was cited as the main reason for buying imported foods “Maybe there’s the odd time when you might just want to change just for maybe a week or, you know” (1M). It was also acknowledged that taste can be an issue: “…they could be more tasty” (3F); “I’ll try those bananas, say they’re from St Lucia, and those … from Barbados or wherever, you think, oh well they taste nicer” (4F). Imported foods are perceived to be generally cheaper than alternatives. Group 1 noted that certain imported foods (exotics) can be more expensive “…some of the imported foods can be more expensive can’t they, if you want a certain type” (1F).

Issues regarding the potentially variable food standards and safety regulations of imported foods were also considered “it’s got a reputation that it’s good, but underneath it might, there might be a question mark there” (3M). This was contradicted in group 2 though, who noted that UK regulations demand high standard for imported foods too, “There’s got to be a standard, even on local, national and imported” (2M).

Trade practices were considered to be important reasons to purchase imported foods “Well, yeah, because a lot of the farmers of the imported stuff from all the countries are being exploited by our supermarkets, I mean they’re getting, where our farmers are protected by the EC Farming Policy” (2M); “I think it supports some countries” (3F1), “…there’s a bit more [exposure on foreign labour laws] though isn’t there because of fair trade” (1F); “Asda actually have a fair trade section” (3F); “Sometimes I base my choice not so much on reputation but on wanting to give my support to a certain country. So if it’s coffee from Italy, which is a rich nation or coffee from somewhere in South America, a poor country, I’d think right, I’m going to buy that one because I want to support those nations” (3F).
Politics also featured prominently when discussing imported foods “I feel lots of people do take a stance against buying, again, [from] the countries that are supporting bad regimes” (3F). Specific mention was made of Zimbabwe in Group 3 only, “Asda were selling runner beans a little while ago from Zimbabwe, and I wouldn’t buy them” (3F), and France in all Groups, “I’m totally against the French anyway; I will not buy anything French” (1M). Importing from the Commonwealth is generally perceived to be acceptable and positive, particularly by older participants “If we’re talking about national I would include the Commonwealth in that...for economics” (1M); “But New Zealand lamb is historically (sic) due to the Commonwealth isn’t it?” (3F); “But also with imported food like bananas, we’ve got huge responsibilities to some places, like St Lucia and that’s the sole thing they do, they export their bananas over to the UK” (4M).

Culture and religion were also mentioned as reasons for the imported food market “…[If its not] a British based religion, they would have to import and so they would automatically go, would prefer imported meat” (1F); “I don’t know whether the black issue comes into it, different races” (1F); “The variety of the cultures within Reading, [means that] if they didn’t provide the services that allow people to eat them [imported foods], there’d be uproar wouldn’t there, and it also means that people like us, you know, you can get your Chinese and Indian spices, that’s quite good” (4M). It should be noted that the majority of participants were not willing to discuss these issues.

Section 4 – Identification & relevance of perceived control
4.1 Proportion of local foods usually purchased
In general, the proportion of local foods purchased on a regular basis was reported to be very low, with the exception of a few women from group 2. Specifically, one woman reported purchasing half local and half non-local produce and another woman reported growing all her own vegetables. Additionally, two women in groups 3 and 4 respectively claimed to source some local produce from parents who owned their own allotments.
Notwithstanding this, there were some specific products, however, that were occasionally purchased locally (and considered local produce) including eggs and butter (groups 1 & 2), berry picking and buying fruit from the farmers market or local farm shop (groups 2 & 3). Interestingly the men in groups 2 and 3 focused more on whether they purchased locally versus local produce.

4.2 What factors would increase willingness to buy more local foods

Despite the low levels of local produce currently bought, it is important to emphasise that all groups reported at least some willingness to buy more local foods if certain barriers were removed.

The increasingly busy lifestyles of modern families (especially among women who tend to be the main food buyers in families) appeared to be the biggest barrier to buying more local products: “Because, you know, is that the time, and you’ve got a week’s shopping to do, you go there [supermarkets] because everything is there” (2F); “...[if] you’ve got to travel to them [farmer’s markets/stalls], so if they came to your local precinct and set up their farm stall, and you were able to buy all the fresh locally grown vegetables before you went into say Waitrose or, I think they would do quite well like that” (2F); “Yes, you’re tied up with other things, it’s what suits you and your lifestyle” (3F); “Because I don’t have the time to go” (3F); “you’ve got to put some thought into it, and have the time to actually do it” (4M). “It’s a different lifestyle these days isn’t it from what it used to be, you used to have the time to go and do the local shopping as such, but now” (1M).

The inability of people to find local produce easily (i.e. the lack of labelling and advertising of local foods) and the fact that the price of local goods were perceived to be relatively high (see section 3 & 6) were also identified as factors limiting the purchase of local foods. There was consensus across all groups on these issues. A female participant summed up the relative weighting of accessibility and price as follows “No, it’s access because I don’t mind
spending a bit more, say, for something that is locally, I don’t want to spend pounds, you know, £2 more than I could get something, but 50p, yeah, I could probably”. (1F). Therefore to encourage the purchase of locally produced foods it is clear that they need to be more convenient, accessible and cheaper in that order.

4.3 Children
Most issues related to buying for children were not directly related to local, national or imported foods. The general consensus across groups was that although consumers do shop differently when they have children (most of the time), they were no more likely to consider the origin of food. Only one woman (Group 4) commented that her grown-up children were interested in where food comes from (local, organic), now that they had children of their own.

It should be noted that nearly all participants agreed that children should be educated about where food comes from and other food related issues. Relatedly, several references were made towards Jamie Oliver’s ‘School Dinners’ television programme (group 3 & 4).

Section 5 – Identification & relevance of subjective norm
Overall, buying British (i.e., local and/or national) foods was personally important to most participants “Yes, because it affects our economy...if we don’t buy British we’re putting our own people out of work” (1M).

5.1 Society’s views
Participants generally believed that society held different attitudes to their own. Most participants felt that other people did not believe that the origin of their foods were important to them or that they were too busy to worry about them “A lot of people don’t care” (1F); “Haven’t got the time to think about these things we’re discussing” (1M). Interestingly, group 1 had the perception that people from larger cities were less likely to be aware of such issues: “So if you look at the fact that more people live in cities,
big cities, than they do rurally and outskirts, then I would say that probably the majority don’t care, if you look at it like that” (1F). Society was also widely perceived as being driven by price and convenience: “The bottom line tends to be price and anytime that we’re watching pennies, you know, all the good intentions go to pot a bit” (3F); “price and convenience, yes” (3F).

Those in society with vested interest in promoting local foods were thought to include farmers, local communities [restaurants and shops], vegetarians (groups 1 & 3), politicians (group 1) and different ethnic groups (group 2 & 3).

Interestingly, all groups mentioned that they thought that the older generations were more aware of issues surrounding the origin of food (groups 1 & 4) as they are educated differently and grew up in a time when lifestyles permitted more opportunity for food buying, preparation and cooking: “…more the fact that they’ve [older members of society] probably been brought up with them people having to be more aware of, you know, local community than there is nowadays, which is sad, but…” (1F); “I think 50 years ago people did, supermarkets didn’t exist … people had to go out and get their food, there was no option, you had to go out and get your food locally. Obviously society’s changed a lot” (3F).

4.2 Friends & family
Friends and family, surprisingly, were not judged to be influential in determining participants’ views on food choice on the whole. However, several participants volunteered information that actually suggested that they were influenced to some degree by friends and family (Groups 3 & 4). “She’s [my wife] got a friend that has done the same [buying organic food], Stephanie, and so it’s like word of mouth where she says, why don’t you try this?” (3M); “for instance I was talking to a friend of mine last week, and she went to the farm shop” (4F).
Section 6—Relevance of price

6.1 How do prices compare for Local, National and Imported foods?
There was a broad consensus across all four groups that local foods were more expensive than national or imported foods, and that national foods were more expensive than imported food.

6.2 What determines these price differences?
Transport costs were given as one of the main reasons for price differentials, although it was acknowledged that there was a conflicting scenario with respect to the higher price for local foods even though the travel and storage costs are low: “you’d expect it to be [cheaper] because if there’s less transport, less packaging involved but it’s not always the case, is it?” (3F); “I’m gobsmacked...well they are more expensive and surely it should be cheaper, they haven’t got to travel anywhere” (4M).

The size and scale of production was mentioned as being an important factor in determining price: “…it’s down to price again, it’s mass production, that’s what they’ve got to do it for” (1M); “…in countries that I’ve heard about, so they’re growing vast quantities of food, wasting a lot, because they’re growing such big things, they can do it for cheaper” (3F).

Size and scale of retail, and the issue of commercialisation (including advertising of food products, more likely for national or imported products) were believed to impact price too: “I think local people have to compete with the big people and their prices might be a little bit higher” (2M); “You’ve also got major companies like Tesco’s who buy in huge, encourage mass production, and they get it all over here, and they sell massively, but I don’t know what, and they’ve made massive profit this year” (3F); “I think some of the difficulties here is that the large food chains squeeze out such a price from the local people for their food products” (4M); “surely this has got to affect
the price, because they’ve got to pay for that advert, and it’s got to go on the cost of the product really they’re selling, it’s got to put the price up. If they cut down a lot of the advertising, it would make the product cheaper” (1M).

Farm labour costs, wage costs and the cost of living were also mentioned: “It’s down to this cheap labour again, ain’t it, that the supermarkets are getting them from, whereas a local man he wants a decent living wage out of it, he’s got to pay his bills as well, so he’s got to charge a reasonable price” (1M1); “local wages” (3F); “cost of living in general” (3F).

EU (CAP) and other subsidies were raised as a reason why local food was more expensive because it was not subsidised (note there were conflicting views and confusion surrounding these issues): “because they’re not subsidised are they the locals farmers, whereas I mean everyone knows about the French don’t they, getting all these big subsidies” (1M); “Well, yeah, because a lot of the farmers of the imported stuff from all the countries are being exploited by our supermarkets, I mean they’re getting, where our farmers are protected by the EC Farming Policy” (2M).

Weather and seasonal production were also likely to impact on prices: “Plus you maybe get me you get some sort of foods that are maybe grown in third world countries where it really is cheap, and so although it might be out of season or whatever, it’s still quite a competitive price” (1M); “Could be things like weather, you know, weather could affect prices” (3M); “Because a lot of things go up and down in price ... something like tomatoes vary in price” (3F).

Issues like quality and quantity were also discussed, higher quality food was synonymous with higher prices (local food was perceived to be of high quality): “…everyone thinks its so much better quality, they’ll pay for
it anyway” (4M). “...lower prices but high quality” (4M). Quantity produced could impact price as local foods were usually produced in smaller volumes: “...its not mass produced” (3F). However, bulk produced local foods can be cheaper “If you do manage to find these local places, you can buy more than you get at supermarkets at a relatively good price. Because if the pre-packaged stuff at supermarkets say we want X amount of something, you’ve got to still pay the same price, haven’t you, so it (price) doubles up each time” (2M); “Buy bulk locally, you’re probably going to get as cheap as you can get” (3M).

Section 7 – Summary and conclusions
In summary, participants were able to differentiate between local, national and imported products both in terms of their geographical location and individuating characteristics. Local food products were usually purchased in small stores, direct from the farmer (i.e., farmer’s markets), or grown at home and were seen to be fresher, seasonal and of higher quality (compared to national or imported products) with less packaging. However, local produce was also widely seen as being inconvenient, inaccessible (i.e., difficult to find) and more expensive to buy. With respect to price, there was also some confusion as to why local products were more expensive and, indeed a consensus that they were over-priced. Finally, despite a wish to support local growers, participants reported buying very few local products. Notwithstanding this, there was a widespread willingness to buy more local products in future, especially if buying could be made more convenient.

National foods encompassed those found in supermarkets. Their lower price and convenience were viewed as the main reasons for purchasing nationally produced foods and, buying national products was seen as good for the UK economy.

Imported goods were classified as those grown outside of the UK, and as being typically frozen and packaged, and less fresh due to added transportation and storage times. As well as allowing added variety in the diet, these products
were purchased because they were perceived as cheaper than comparable alternatives. Finally, there was a surprisingly large amount of support for buying imported foods to help certain countries (e.g., commonwealth countries) and poor farmers.

In terms of encouraging greater uptake of locally produce foods, as mentioned above, convenience, accessibility and price seem to be the key limiting factors. Generally, participants thought that society had little interest in the origin of their food, and somewhat unexpectedly reported that their own opinions would not be swayed by the views of friends and families.

Overall, most of the attitudes and issues identified in the four focus groups appeared to generalise across demographic variables such as age and SES. For example, the expense of locally produced food was a concern across both low and high socio-economic groups. However, there were some notable exceptions. Firstly, women reported buying slightly more local products than men and were also more concerned with issues such as taste and freshness. This may of course reflect the fact that they tended to buy the food for the family rather than their partners. Additionally, there was some evidence that older adults were actually more aware of and interested in issues surrounding the origin of their food than younger adults.

To conclude, participants in four focus groups reported buying few local products compared to national and imported ones. However, participants were receptive to the idea of buying more local produce in future. Whilst we can only speculate at present, it seems likely that this resolve will be further strengthened if locally (and nationally) produced foods are perceived by consumers to be nutritionally enriched in comparison to imports.
Appendix 1 – Recruitment questionnaire

Recruitment Questionnaire

Q1: Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2: What was your age at your last birthday?  

(If under 18 or over 70 CLOSE)

Q3: What is your occupation?  

(If currently a STUDENT please CLOSE)

Q4: What is the occupation of the chief income earner of your household?:  

Socio-Economic Group
Recruit for Group 3 or 4

Recruit for Group 1 or 2

Q5: Have you ever taken part in a focus group or discussion group before?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>CLOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CONTINUE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q6: We are looking for people who work in certain occupations, can you please tell me if you or anyone in your household works in any of the following occupations.

Health food or beverage industry 1
Food industry (manufacture, retail, research etc) 2
Market research or marketing 3
Car industry 4
Teaching 5
None of these 6

CLOSE
CONTINUE
Q7:  Do you have any children who are aged 16 or under?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q8:  How would you describe where you live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A city/large town (e.g. Reading town centre)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Urban recruit to 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A town suburb (e.g. Lower Earley)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small town (e.g. Twyford)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A village (e.g. Burfield)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rural recruit to 50% (less than 10,000 people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In open countryside (e.g. on a farm, in woodland)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q9: Which of the following levels of education have you achieved?
(Please circle all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No formal education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary (6th Form)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Education (non-university degree)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q10: Would you be willing to participate in a group discussion on food and your attitude towards food? This will be recorded by audio tape.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>CONTINUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>CLOSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THANK RESPONDENT FOR THEIR TIME

INTERVIEWER DECLARATION

You must complete this section neatly for the interview to be valid. Please complete it once the respondent has agreed to participate.

I declare that I have conducted this interview within the MRS Code of Conduct and in accordance with the written instructions.

NAME (PRINT)
**Appendix 2 – Definitions of local, national and imported across all four focus groups**

### Local foods are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>30 mile radius</td>
<td>20-50 mile radius</td>
<td>20 mile radius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Seasonal &amp; typical of the region</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
<td>Expensive except when purchased in bulk</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Supports local farmers</td>
<td>Supports local farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Produced in small quantities</td>
<td>Less commercial</td>
<td>Produced in small quantities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High in taste, quality and freshness</td>
<td>High in taste and freshness</td>
<td>Less food safety standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Supports local farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Supports local farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Produced in small quantities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High in taste, quality and freshness</td>
<td>High in taste and freshness</td>
<td>Less food safety standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Supports local farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Supports local farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Produced in small quantities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High in taste, quality and freshness</td>
<td>High in taste and freshness</td>
<td>Less food safety standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Supports local farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Supports local farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Produced in small quantities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High in taste, quality and freshness</td>
<td>High in taste and freshness</td>
<td>Less food safety standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Supports local farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Not readily available</td>
<td>Supports local farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Inconvenient</td>
<td>Produced in small quantities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High in taste, quality and freshness</td>
<td>High in taste and freshness</td>
<td>Less food safety standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### National foods are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Grown in the UK</td>
<td>Produced in the UK</td>
<td>Produced in the UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
<td>Seasonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Cheaper than local</td>
<td>Cheaper than local</td>
<td>Cheaper than local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Available in supermarkets</td>
<td>Convenient</td>
<td>Available in supermarkets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports UK economy</td>
<td>High food safety standards</td>
<td>Mass produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less food miles travelled</td>
<td>Issues regarding pesticides &amp; GM</td>
<td>High in taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High standards/quality</td>
<td>Increased choice</td>
<td>Increased choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass produced</td>
<td>Issues regarding pesticides &amp; GM</td>
<td>High in taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low food safety standards</td>
<td>Increased choice</td>
<td>Increased choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural &amp; political issues</td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass produced</td>
<td>Fair trade</td>
<td>High in taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower food safety standards</td>
<td>Issues regarding pesticides &amp; GM</td>
<td>Less fresh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass produced</td>
<td>Fair trade</td>
<td>High in taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower food safety standards</td>
<td>Issues regarding pesticides &amp; GM</td>
<td>Less fresh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
<td>Cultural issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mass produced</td>
<td>Fair trade</td>
<td>High in taste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Focus group protocol

General instructions

a) The focus group should last no longer than 120 minutes. Timing of each part can be adjusted a little as required – however the facilitator should aim to spend at least 15 minutes on each of parts 1-4.

b) Progressive numbers refer to issues to be covered. Questions can be slightly adapted in consideration of language and cultural context.

c) Text in italics contains indications for facilitators.

d) The set of pointers under the heading "memo for facilitators" are meant to clarify which dimensions and aspects of an issue are of interest for the research. Lists are not necessary exhaustive nor must each point be addressed. By no means the pointers are to be interpreted as questions to be asked as such. They are to be used as reminders to facilitators for keeping discussion within the research aims.
FOCUS GROUP 1

Perspectives on local vs. national vs. imported foods

INTRODUCTION (15 minutes)

0. Introduction by moderator

Introduce yourself. Introduce the project and research theme (See ‘Blurb’ below). Explain facilitators' role. Explain what use will be made of audio recordings: the recordings will only be used by the researchers, and the identity of the participants will not be revealed. The group will be discussing attitudes towards foods. Explain that participants are free to express their opinions, that their opinions matter, that there are no right or wrong answers, and that this should be enjoyable.

Blurb:

This project is jointly funded by the ESRC, NERC and BBSRC research councils. The overall objective of the research is to examine the potential for the development of internationally competitive food chains capable of delivering foods that consumers wish to buy at prices they are willing to pay and to assess the impact on land use, the environment and the economy.

The main aim of this part of the project is:
1. To assess consumers' attitudes, behaviour and willingness to pay for local vs national vs imported foods.

Warm-up question

1. Will you please each introduce yourselves (first name, occupation, where you live)

Memo for facilitators: information about age and education should have been already recorded – See instructions for Focus Groups composition

PART 1 – SELECTION OF RELEVANT ATTRIBUTES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS LOCAL/NATIONAL/IMPORTED FOODS (25 mins)

2. In terms of foods, what do the terms LOCAL, NATIONAL and IMPORTED MEAN TO YOU?

Memo for facilitators:
- Explore defining attributes of each – e.g., distance travelled, seasonal, quality, freshness, taste, flavour, exotic, environment, availability etc.
3. What are the differences between them?
   a) LOCAL vs NATIONAL
   b) LOCAL/NATIONAL vs IMPORTED

   Memo for facilitators:
   - Identify the range of attributes listed above that distinguish each category.
   - Try to establish which are the most important attributes for both a) and b)

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of?
   a) LOCAL foods
   b) NATIONAL foods
   c) IMPORTED foods

   Memo for facilitators:
   Try to cover attitudes regarding at least the following:
   - Sensory (taste, flavour, appearance)
   - Health related benefits/costs (e.g., overuse of pesticide sprays on imported produce)
   - Price (and implications for wider UK economy)
   - Ethical
   - Environmental
   - Societal (farming, jobs, community)
   - Practical (e.g., availability – nearby farmer markets etc)
   - Choice (imports provide wider varieties of fruit etc)

PART 2 – IDENTIFICATION AND RELEVANCE OF PERCEIVED CONTROL FACTORS

5. Currently, roughly what proportion of the food that you buy is LOCALLY produced?
   Memo for facilitators:
   - Try to establish the range within the group
   - Explore the varieties of local foods that are bought (e.g., vegetables, soft fruits, meats, processed foods, organics etc)

6. What factors do you see as important in determining your willingness to buy MORE LOCAL foods?
   Memo for facilitators:
   - Explore factors such as price, access (location of local butchers etc), perceived and actual health benefits, family needs, level of interest/awareness, better marketing, lifestyle (e.g., lack of time to source local foods), food safety issues (e.g., Foot and mouth disease, BSE, salmonella), unclear labelling of ‘country of origin’, availability of product (e.g., UK grown orange?), ethical considerations (e.g., free trade)
• Compare the relative importance/loading of these factors on decision to buy more local foods

7. Are there any factors that currently make buying **LOCALLY produced foods difficult**?  
   **Memo for facilitators**  
   • Draw on factors identified above.  
   • Encourage participants to describe in detail WHY particular factors are seen as barriers.

8. Does this differ depending on whether buying for yourself or buying for your children?  
   **Memo for facilitators**  
   • You might give an example here such as ‘perhaps you take more notice of labelling when buying for your children’.

**PART 3 – IDENTIFICATION OF REFERENTS FOR SUBJECTIVE NORM MEASUREMENT?**

9a). How does society in general feel about **LOCALLY produced vs NATIONAL vs IMPORTED foods**?  

9b). Are there particular groups or individuals that hold strong views regarding **LOCAL foods**?  
   **Memo for facilitators**  
   • UK farmers  
   • Environmental lobby  
   • Supermarkets/small independent retailers (greengrocers, butchers etc)  
   • Haulage/transport industry  
   • Health organisations  
   • Government

10a). Are there any groups or individuals whose views on eating **LOCAL foods you would particularly value?**  
10b). How much do you identify with each of these?  
   **Memo for facilitators**  
   • Family/friends  
   • UK farmers  
   • Government/non government health organisations

11. To what extent would your friends and family strongly approve of your buying more **LOCALLY produced foods**?  
   • Encourage discussion of reasons for the variation across participants

**PART 4 – EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF PRICE PERCEPTION**
12. On average, how do prices for LOCALLY/NATIONALLY and IMPORTED foods compare?

Note for facilitators
- Try to ascertain the degree of consensus on this
- Does perceived price vary depending on the product?

13. What factors do you think determine the difference in price between LOCAL and IMPORTED foods?

Explore
Reasons for inequalities in prices – try to cover the following
- Labour costs
- Prestige factors (e.g., ‘English strawberries’)
- More/less intensive farming methods
- Transport costs
- Supermarket bulk buying
- Regulations (e.g., ethical treatment of livestock)

PART 5 – OTHER ISSUES

14. Aside from those already discussed, are there any other issues that are relevant in choosing between LOCAL, NATIONAL, and IMPORTED foods?

FEEDBACK AND CLOSE (10 minutes)

Summarise main points of discussion and ask for their feedback. Mention that the project (of which the focus group forms an important part) will enable better understanding of the scientific and socio-economic basis for sustainable, internationally competitive, UK based food chains.

Emphasise the value of the participants’ contribution, and thank them again for attending.

If any respondents require further information about the nature of the research being undertaken or require any clarification on how these discussions will be used please contact:

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